HOW TO BUILD CULTURE IN A HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT

As we continue to operate in a hybrid model, organizations are stuck. Virtual is not providing a space for efficient working conditions nor growing company culture, and going into the office is creating a disgruntled employee base. While both options are optimal for some, the availability of choice has created friction. Many have landed on a hybrid model, where employees travel to an office on a reduced but standard cadence. However there are many unknowns in this model, which mainly center around company culture. How do we ensure we can generate a quality company culture in a hybrid model where people don't want to always be in the office nor spend more time than what is required in front of their computer screen? We're searching for strategies to improve company culture in the hybrid model under these difficult circumstances.

WAYS TO IMPROVE A HYBRID-WORK CULTURE

Connecting Through Emotional Proximity

Remote environments remove the physical proximity that once helped foster emotional connectedness, creativity, and problem solving between employees. This has caused workplaces to seek out other ways to improve culture. Emotional proximity is focused on connecting employees and making sure they feel seen. Improving emotional proximity could look like having your camera on, catching up about the weekend and important life events, and rewarding accomplishments. These methods can help employees feel comfortable around their coworkers, foster friendships, and improve happiness and productivity.

Fostering Feedback

Providing both positive and constructive feedback to employees is key for success and productivity. This helps employees stay engaged and feel connected to their work. Feedback coming from Managers can also help employees get guidance on expectations and understand their growth potential.

WAYS TO IMPROVE A HYBRID-WORK CULTURE

Building a Mentorship Program

It used to be much easier for employees to onboard to a new job, but onboarding activities have become more difficult in the hybrid world. It's hard to learn the office culture and prepare for new responsibilities virtually. So much learning is done through watching peers and shadowing leaders. Having a mentorship program helps employees transition into their new role and help teach them about the workplace culture. This can help make the transition process less stressful and ensure the new hire feels comfortable with their responsibilities.

Facilitate Conversation

It's easy to have workplaces become siloed by department and not have cross communication throughout the company. Silo's can limit the flow of ideas and problem solving and make it more difficult to share information. These silo's can hurt productivity and innovation in the company since it limits employees' abilities to work together. To break down these silo's employees should have avenues to engage with each other, which could look like an All Hands meeting, cross-team lunches, and workplace events.

Be Intentional About In-Person Workdays

Hybrid work environments can have their challenges, but people enjoy the flexibility of working from home a few days a week. It can cause frustrations when employees feel like they have to go into the office to sit at their computer all day, which they could do from home. Companies should prioritize getting people into the office on the same days, prioritizing in person meetings when available, and having lunch together. This will help employees feel better about coming into the office and give them a break from staring at their computers.

Fostering Microcultures

While a completely siloed workplace can negatively impact the business, it's critical to foster smaller teams to ensure employees are feeling connected to their direct co-workers. To foster microcultures companies should think about getting teams together a few times a year to increase connectedness, facilitate problem solving and sharing ideas, as well as rewarding them for their successes. These small in person sessions will help grow friendships & improve communication.

A HYBRID WORKING CASE STUDY

Smuckers is adopting a unique approach to return-to-office. Instead of requiring employees to come in on specific days of the week, they've implemented a system of 22 "core weeks" per year, pre-scheduled in advance - typically amounting to two per month. This allows employees to live far from the company's headquarters, as they only need to be present during core weeks.

While many employees make long drives or super-commute, they are required to cover travel costs. The flexibility offered by core weeks allows employees to

balance in-office work with remote work, making it easier to manage their personal lives and maintain their flexibility. Smuckers avoids requiring employees to relocate to Orrville, which sets it apart from companies like Chevron, Amazon, and Walmart, who are covering moving expenses for employees returning to the office.

Smucker's approach appears to have garnered positive feedback, resulting in limited resistance to the return-to-office plan. This model aligns with the growing trend of hybrid work, which prioritizes employee choice, ultimately contributing to higher job satisfaction, cost savings, and increased personal time. However, the success of such a model hinges on effective execution, striking a balance between in-person and remote work, and catering to individual team needs.